Is there a contextual basis for inferring from the text that those described by Paul in Phil. 3:18-19 (For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.) could include those who preached Christ out of envy in Phil. 1:17-18?

Yes, there is a contextual basis within the letter of Philippians for inferring that the "many" Paul describes as "enemies of the cross of Christ" in 3:18–19 could include (or be the same as) the preachers who proclaimed Christ "from envy and rivalry" and "selfish ambition" in 1:15–18.

Textual Connections in Philippians:

Several threads in the letter itself support linking or overlapping the two descriptions:

- **Continuity of reference**: In 3:18 Paul says he has "often told you before" about these people and now repeats the warning "even with tears." Chapter 1 already introduces a troubling group of preachers active while Paul is imprisoned whose motives are envy (*phthonos*), rivalry/strife, and selfish ambition (1:15, 17), with some acting "in pretense" (1:18). The "often" language creates a natural link to the earlier report.

- **Shared profile of self-centeredness and earthly focus**: The ch. 1 preachers act from "selfish ambition" (1:17) and "in pretense." This matches the character sketch in 3:19: "their god is their stomach [belly], … their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things." Both passages portray people who proclaim or associate with Christ yet operate from self-seeking motives rather than the self-giving love the letter commends.

- **Destruction as outcome**: Paul states in 1:28 that the opposition will prove to be "a clear sign … of their destruction." This is echoed verbatim in 3:19 ("Their end is destruction").

- **The cross as the dividing line**: The "enemies of the cross of Christ" (3:18) stand in contrast to those who embrace "the fellowship of his sufferings" and are "conformed to his death" (3:10). The ch. 1 preachers proclaim Christ but appear unwilling to accept the suffering and humility the cross entails in this letter (cf. 1:29–30; 2:5–11). Proclaiming Christ while avoiding the cross's implications effectively makes them its enemies in Paul's framing.

- **Recurring warnings against selfish ambition throughout the letter**: Philippians repeatedly contrasts selfish ambition and vainglory (2:3) with the mind of Christ. Paul warns against each person looking only to "his own interests" (2:4) and notes that "all seek their own interests" (2:21). These motifs cluster around the rival preachers and prepare for the sharper description in ch. 3.

These elements allow a unified reading in which the same (or overlapping) group of rival Christian workers is in view: they are active in gospel proclamation yet driven by envy and self-interest, rendering them opponents of what the cross represents—sacrificial love and longing for others.

"***David E. Fredrickson's article "Envious Enemies of the Cross of Christ (Philippians 3:18)***"

This article published in *Word & World* 28.1 (Winter 2008): 22–28. is a legitimate, peer-reviewed piece by a New Testament professor at Luther Seminary. Its abstract states the thesis directly:

> "*Contrary to the common understanding, the 'enemies of the cross of Christ' in Phil 3:18 are the same people who 'proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry' in 1:15. These 'enemies' want Paul's fame, but not the suffering that is built into loving*."

The article's argument has real exegetical merit. It accounts for the letter's literary unity, the repeated "often told you" language, the clustering of self-seeking motifs, and the cultural resonance of envy leading to enmity among professional peers. It offers a fresh way to hold 1:15–18 and 3:18–19 together without forcing the text.

Fredrickson argues that many interpreters (influenced by Karl Barth's reading) treat the "enemies" primarily as resistors of the cross's call to humility/submission. He proposes instead that the letter's unifying conceptual thread is the ancient understanding of *envy* (*phthonos*).

In Greco-Roman thought, envy was not merely desire for another's goods but active ill-will that wished to deprive the other; it naturally produced *enmity*, especially among peers in the same profession or craft (citing Hesiod, Basil, Plutarch,

and others). Paul and these rival preachers belong to the same "craft" of gospel ministry, so competition for honor and success breeds envy.

The article traces "envy's vicious companions" through Philippians:

- Strife and selfish ambition (1:15, 17; 2:3).
- Deceptive speech and pretense (1:17–18).
- Abusive or muttering speech (2:14–15), which prepares for the invective in 3:2 ("Beware the dogs," "Beware the mutilation").
- Bestial behavior and self-seeking that ends in destruction (1:28; 3:19—"god is the belly," "glory in their shame," "mind … on earthly things").

This framework lets Fredrickson read the letter as a unity without positing multiple distinct opponent groups or letter fragments. He reinterprets the harsh language of 3:2 as envy-inspired abusive speech and beast-like conduct rather than (or alongside) a literal reference to Judaizing circumcision advocates. Paul's own emphasis on his labor, success, and especially his *longing* for the church (1:8) becomes indirect self-praise: he is envied precisely because of the genuine love that involves suffering—the very thing the envious rivals want the fame of but refuse.

Fredrickson also contrasts this with a different understanding of the cross: not merely a "barrier" to human presumption (Barth), but the ultimate expression of Christ's longing for humanity. Enmity with the cross then means despising such longing; the rivals preach Christ but not in a way that embraces the suffering built into authentic love.

<u>The Idiomatic Sense in Ancient Context</u>:

A first-century reader of Paul's letter (especially a Greek-speaking audience in a Hellenistic Roman colony like Philippi) would most naturally have heard "whose god is their belly" (ὧν ὁ θεὸς ἡ κοιλία) as an idiomatic, pejorative stock expression for people ruled by their natural appetites and sensual desires.

In Greco-Roman moral philosophy and popular rhetoric, the belly (*koilia* or related terms like *gastēr*) frequently served as a codeword or topos for the lower appetites—gluttony, drinking, sexual desire, and self-indulgence more broadly. Plato's anthropology located the unruly desires in the stomach and the organs below it (as opposed to the rational mind, which had a divine kinship). Mastery of these "belly" desires was a standard ethical goal across philosophical schools; failure to master them marked someone as living like an animal, egoistically, and oriented toward the earthly rather than the higher or divine.

The specific formulation of making the belly one's *god* or serving the stomach appears as a recognized commonplace. It was applied polemically to pleasure-seekers and was a frequent caricature of Epicureans (even if the caricature oversimplified their actual teaching). Ancient sources associate it with living for "eat and drink," burying the mind in the belly, and treating bodily gratification as the supreme good.

Early Christian writers such as Clement of Alexandria and John Chrysostom read Paul's phrase in exactly this light—luxury, gluttony, and the motto "let us eat and drink."

Karl Olav Sandnes's detailed study *Belly and Body in the Pauline Epistles* demonstrates that this is the cultural competence first-century readers would have brought to the text. The phrase is not primarily a coded reference to Jewish dietary laws (though some modern interpreters have suggested that for the "Judaizer" reading of the opponents). The analogies in both Greco-Roman and Jewish-Hellenistic sources point instead to ethical critique of appetite-driven living.

<u>Relation to the Other Descriptors</u>:

The subsequent phrases—"their glory is in their shame" and "their mind is set on earthly things"—function as closely related elaborations of the same character rather than fully independent categories. Sandnes treats the belly-as-god dictum from a *pars pro toto* perspective: it encapsulates the cluster of complaints.

The ancient pattern surrounding the belly-topos regularly links enslavement to appetite with shameful conduct (or taking pride in what ought to produce shame) and an earthly, horizontal mindset.

In the flow of Philippians 3:19 the four elements form a unified portrait:

- End = destruction
- God = the belly (appetites as the controlling power)
- Glory = in their shame (pride in base or shameful things)
- Mindset = earthly things

A first-century reader would not have parsed these as three or four discrete, unrelated charges. They describe one coherent lifestyle of self-seeking, appetite-driven, earthly-oriented existence that stands opposed to the cross.

This reading is also compatible with the argument in the Fredrickson article you provided earlier. There the phrase is taken as part of the characterization of the envious rivals as self-seeking, vainglorious, and petty-minded, with classical parallels (including Homeric and rhetorical backgrounds) for the belly language in contexts of base, insulting behavior. In short, yes—the phrase is idiomatically about natural (carnal/sensual/selfish) appetites elevated to the status of a god, and the following clauses further describe that same orientation rather than introducing entirely separate categories. This understanding fits both the broader moral-philosophical commonplaces of the first century and the immediate rhetorical purpose in Philippians of contrasting such people with those whose citizenship is in heaven and who follow the pattern of the cross.

There is a coherent contextual basis within the letter to the Philippians for understanding the "many" who "live as enemies of the cross of Christ" in 3:18–19 as including—or being identical with—the preachers who proclaimed Christ "from envy and rivalry" and "selfish ambition" in 1:15–18.

Paul's language creates continuity across the letter. In 3:18 he states that he has "often told you before" about these people and now repeats the warning "even with tears." Chapter 1 has already introduced a group of preachers active during his imprisonment whose motives are envy (*phthonos*), rivalry, and selfish ambition, with some acting "in pretense." The repeated "often" language links the earlier report to the later warning. Shared character traits reinforce the connection: both groups display self-centeredness (selfish ambition in 1:17; "all seek their own interests" in 2:21), both are associated with destruction as their outcome (1:28; 3:19), and both stand in tension with the cross, which in Philippians embodies self-giving suffering and humility (2:5–11; 3:10) rather than status-seeking.

David E. Fredrickson's essay "*Envious Enemies of the Cross of Christ (Philippians 3:18)*" develops this identification by tracing the ancient understanding of envy as the unifying conceptual thread. In Greco-Roman culture, envy was not merely coveting what another possessed; it included active ill-will that wished to strip the other of valued goods and thereby turned the envious person into an enemy. Envy characteristically arose among peers in the same profession or craft. Paul and the rival preachers share the "craft" of gospel ministry, so competition for honor and success naturally breeds envy. The letter then unfolds envy's companions: strife (1:15), selfish ambition (1:17; 2:3), deceptive and abusive speech (1:17–18; 2:14–15; the invective of 3:2—"dogs," "evil workers," "mutilation"), and ultimately enmity with the cross itself. Paul presents himself as the successful laborer who is envied precisely for his longing for the church—a longing that involves suffering. The rivals want the fame of apostolic success but refuse the suffering built into genuine love. On this reading the harsh language of 3:2 need not point to an entirely separate Judaizing party; it can function as envy-inspired invective against the same self-seeking missionaries.

Within this unified portrait the description in 3:19 coheres tightly. A first-century reader—especially a Greek-speaking audience in a Hellenistic Roman colony—would have recognized "whose god is their belly" (ὧν ὁ θεὸς ἡ κοιλία) as an idiomatic moral-philosophical topos. In ancient ethical discourse the belly served as a codeword for the lower appetites (gluttony, sensual pleasure, self-indulgence). Platonic and subsequent moral philosophy located unruly desires in the stomach and the organs below it, in contrast to the rational mind. Making the belly one's god meant allowing these natural appetites to become the controlling power of life, an orientation frequently caricatured as animal-like, egoistic, and opposed to self-mastery. The phrase was a recognized commonplace applied to pleasure-seekers and was not primarily a coded reference to Jewish dietary regulations.

The clauses that follow—"their glory is in their shame" and "their mind is set on earthly things"—do not introduce wholly separate categories. They elaborate the same lifestyle. Ancient patterns surrounding the belly-topos regularly link enslavement to appetite with taking pride in what is shameful and with an earthly rather than heavenly mindset. The four elements of 3:19 therefore form a single coherent characterization: those whose end is destruction, whose functional deity is their appetites, who glory in what ought to produce shame, and whose entire orientation is earthly. This portrait

matches the self-seeking, vainglorious rivals already introduced in chapter 1 and stands in deliberate contrast to the heavenly citizenship and cruciform pattern set before the Philippians in 3:20–21.

SUMMARY CONCLUSION:

A coherent reading of Philippians supports the inference that the "many" whom Paul describes as "enemies of the cross of Christ" in 3:18–19 include, or are identical with, those who earlier preached Christ "from envy and rivalry" and "selfish ambition" in 1:15–18. The letter's internal connections, its sustained contrast between self-seeking ambition and cruciform humility, and the ancient cultural logic of envy supply the necessary contextual basis for this identification. Paul signals continuity when he writes in 3:18 that he has "often told you before" about these people and now repeats the warning "even with tears." Chapter 1 has already introduced a group of preachers active during his imprisonment whose motives are envy (*phthonos*), rivalry or strife, and selfish ambition, some acting "in pretense." The shared language of self-centeredness (1:17; 2:3, 21), the motif of destruction as their outcome (1:28; 3:19), and the opposition of both groups to the pattern of the cross (which in Philippians embodies self-giving suffering rather than status) allow the two passages to be read as describing the same or overlapping set of rivals.

David E. Fredrickson's essay "*Envious Enemies of the Cross of Christ (Philippians 3:18)*" advances this reading by recovering the ancient understanding of envy as the letter's unifying conceptual thread. In Greco-Roman culture envy was not merely the desire to possess what another held; it included active ill-will that sought to strip the other of valued goods and thereby converted the envious person into an enemy. Envy characteristically arose among peers engaged in the same craft or profession. Paul and the rival preachers share the craft of gospel ministry; competition for honor and public recognition therefore readily produces envy.

Paul's epistle unfolds envy's characteristic companions: strife (1:15), selfish ambition (1:17; 2:3), deceptive and abusive speech (1:17–18; 2:14–15; the invective of 3:2—"dogs," "evil workers," "mutilation"), and finally enmity with the cross itself.

Paul presents himself as the successful laborer envied precisely for his longing for the church—a longing that necessarily involves suffering. The rivals desire the fame of apostolic success but refuse the suffering inherent in genuine love. On this account the sharp language of 3:2 need not require an entirely separate Judaizing party; it can function as envy-inspired invective directed against the same self-seeking missionaries.

Within this unified portrait the description in 3:19 coheres tightly. A first-century Greek-speaking reader in a Hellenistic Roman colony such as Philippi would have recognized the phrase "whose god is their belly" (ᾧν ὁ θεὸς ἡ κοιλία) as an idiomatic moral-philosophical topos. In ancient ethical discourse the belly served as a codeword for the lower appetites—gluttony, sensual pleasure, and self-indulgence more broadly. Platonic anthropology and the subsequent tradition of moral philosophy located unruly desires in the stomach and the organs below it, in contrast to the rational mind that possessed a divine kinship. Making the belly one's god meant allowing these natural appetites to become the controlling power of life, an orientation regularly caricatured as animal-like, egoistic, and opposed to self-mastery. The expression was a recognized commonplace applied to pleasure-seekers and was not primarily a coded allusion to Jewish dietary regulations.

The first-century understanding of "whose god is their belly" as the deification of natural appetites further solidifies that reading by furnishing a vivid, culturally recognizable description of precisely the self-seeking orientation that envy produces. The rivals proclaim Christ, yet they do so in a manner that refuses the suffering and longing built into the cross; they desire the reputation of success without the costly love that true apostolic labor entails.

While many interpreters continue to distinguish the preachers of chapter 1 from a separate group of Judaizing opponents in chapter 3, the literary unity of the letter, the repeated warnings, the shared motifs of selfish ambition and destruction, and the cultural resonance of envy as a peer-to-peer vice that produces enmity supply a clear contextual basis for reading the enemies of the cross as including those who earlier preached Christ from envy.